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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-JAPAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies continued to focus news coverage May 10 on the 2008 presidential election; and on a scandal over a local TV network allegedly falsifying information in a documentary on the 2-28 Incident of 1947. The pro-status quo "China Times" ran an exclusive banner headline on page two that said "The United States Rejects Taiwan's Delegation to Go to Washington D.C. to Campaign for [the Island's] WHO Bid." The same paper also devoted two-thirds of its page two to covering the U.S. State Department's and Japan's responses to Taiwan's WHO bid.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the pro-status quo "China Times" discussed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ambiguous gestures in dealing with the United States and China. An op-ed in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" discussed the scrapping of cross-strait issues from the joint statement following the U.S.-Japan Two-plus-Two security meeting and said "the US team on Asia probably determined that this was not the time to amplify its position regarding cross-strait matters." An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" criticized the pan-Blue camp for "spinning" on the U.S.-Japan joint statement and said that Taiwan is not absent from the U.S.-Japan security dialogue. End summary.

A) "Shinzo Abe's Ambiguous Gesture"

The "International Outlook" column in the pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] commented (5/10):

"... Abe has never really been able to come up with a decisive Asian policy. On the one hand, he wants to show the world that Japan is both politically and militarily a big country, but on the other hand, he dares not offend China and South Korea. Abe has also been an appeaser during his policy coordination with the United States. The U.S. policy is to turn Japan into 'East Asia's Great Britain,' just as former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage had advocated, and to use it as a trusted subordinate so that [the U.S. and Japan] can jointly control the situation in Asia. Japan, on the other hand, takes advantage of this opportunity by making use of U.S. support to seek to become a leader in Asia. But in the meantime, the United States, in fear that its interests will be jeopardized, does not allow Japan to mess up the current situation in Asia.

"The United States' current policy is to view China as 'a stakeholder.' It seeks resolution to certain political issues and economic cooperation [with Beijing] while at the same time joining hands with Japan, Australia, and even India to counterbalance China. The U.S. move is a potential arrangement rather than a mechanism, and the U.S. policy will surely be sabotaged if serious conflict were to break between Japan and China. ...

"The fact that the United States and Japan decided in their Security

Consultative Committee meeting to scrap cross-Strait issue [from their joint statement] proved that Washington does not want to see Japan make trouble out of nothing. It is not coincidental that both the U.S. government and U.S. mainstream media have been commenting lately on the sex slaves issue [during World War II] and visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. ..."

B) "The Silence in the U.S.-Japan 2+2 Statement"

Kurt Campbell, CEO and co-founder of the Center for a New American Security in Washington, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (5/10):

"... What has raised a few eyebrows is the general absence of the subject of the situation across the Taiwan Strait as an enduring matter of mutual concern, particularly given the central treatment of the subject in the previous 2+2 statements, when the US and Japan came out firmly and in unison for preserving peace and security across the Taiwan Strait. ... However, documents such as these are important not only for what is specifically articulated but for things that go unmentioned as well. And in this respect, the subject of the Taiwan Strait and Taiwan itself goes unheeded. What is the meaning behind such an oversight? ...

"The best interpretation for the oversight -- and indeed the most likely explanation -- is that the central point around the emerging US-Japan consensus on the maintenance of stability across the Taiwan Strait had already been established, and further elaboration was unnecessary and seen to be potentially counterproductive. ... It is also the case that Japan seeks closer ties (or at least less tension) with China at this time, given all the recent turmoil in relations, and few things stir more Chinese suspicion and outrage than Japanese proclamations on Taiwan. So it is not unreasonable to assume that Japanese diplomats are seeking to send a somewhat conciliatory message to Chinese friends in one area - the Taiwan Strait - while moving ahead expeditiously in other areas like constitutional reform and military modernization - issues that raise concerns in Beijing, but to a lesser degree. In this sense, Japanese foreign policy and national security players are mindful of the balancing act they are trying to play in Asia and with China in particular. ...

"Finally, it is also true that China has put its enormous influence behind the recent momentum in six-party talks with North Korea, and US diplomats are ever mindful of avoiding what can be seen as potential flashpoints in Sino-US relations. The entire US strategy toward North Korea requires continuing pressure from China on Pyongyang in the background, and this is well understood at the State Department. In the current environment -- with Taiwan providing disappointments in the defense arena and concerns over domestic provocations and China rendering quiet assistance in ongoing nuclear talks -- the US team on Asia probably determined that this was not the time to amplify its position regarding cross-Strait matters."

C) "Taiwan Not Absent from U.S.-Japan Security Dialogue"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (5/10):

"... This year's statement made no direct references to Taiwan, and in the wake of its release, PRC diplomatic analysts and media claimed that Taiwan had been dropped from the list of the U.S.-Japan 'common security objectives,' attributing it to the adjustment to improvements in relations between Japan and the PRC, and between Beijing and Washington in the intervening two years. ... This 'spin' on the U.S.-Japan joint statement completely ignores the fact that the Beijing regime is now beset by serious problems of economic overheating and imbalances and social instability, and is based on the debatable assumption that the U.S. and Japan have no choice but to follow China's preferences and are genuinely intimidated by the PRC's military might. ...

"In addition, the position of pan-KMT scholars that neither the U.S. nor Japan wish to give the Taiwan government 'misleading signals' is based on their own questionable assumption that the DPP government is 'the troublemaker' in the Taiwan Strait, an assumption that overlooks the fundamental changes in the cross-Strait situation

quite 'arbitrarily' made by Beijing's massive military buildup, weaponry deployment and its enactment of a belligerent 'anti-secession law' in March 2005. ... From the above, it is evident that the brain trust of the pan-KMT camp is actually the side that is attempting to send 'disinformation' or 'wrong signals,' and that their intention is to convince the Taiwan people that the United States and Japan are afraid of the PRC and that the strategic objective of Washington and Tokyo is to 'contain China.' ..."

YOUNG